2:Gough E-4, 5 (1947-1949)1961 A W11 Kerala A W11
Central Kerala Nayar

A husband normally visited his wife after eating supper in his natal home, and left before breakfast. Even today in many orthodox Nayar homes men eat regularly in their taravāds and accept food in their wives' homes only on special invitation from their wives' kāranavans. Traditionally a husband placed his weapons outside his wife's door as a sign to other men that he was within. My informants in a Cochin village reported that, within living memory in the late nineteenth century, if two husbands called on the same night the one who came last might sleep outside on the veranda. Usually a woman's regular husbands knew each other and informally agreed upon their turns.

The relationship with the visiting husband was called *sambandham* (Sanskrit, "joining together"). At the start of a girl's first sambandham her husband came to her house privately at night, sometimes with a few friends of his own age. In the presence of the girl's kin he presented her with a white cloth of the kind worn as a skirt. The occasion was not marked by feasting. Later husbands might or might not present the cloth. A transient visitor is said to have left a gold coin beneath the woman's pillow, and a regular husband might do the same on the first night of his union.

While his relationship lasted, a regular husband was expected to make gifts to his wife at the three main festivals of the year. Vishu, in April, was the Malayalam New Year; Onam, in September, was a harvest festival; Tiruvadira, in December, was a women's festival to Kama Devan, the god of passion. The gifts were of bathing oil, bananas, wafer biscuits, and betel leaves and areca nuts for chewing. In some areas a husband also gave a loin cloth of superior quality at Onam. The gifts were prepared by women of the husband's taravād, and he should present them in person to each of his wives on the festival day. If a husband failed to make these gifts it was a tacit sign that he had ended the relationship. It should be noted that the gifts, trivial in value, were gifts of courtship and were in no sense maintenance. Bathing oil is a feminine toilet requisite; wafer biscuits are delicacies served at feasts; and the giving of chewing materials between a man and a woman is everywhere in South India associated with courtship or with the first night of marriage. A husband had no obligation at all to maintain his wife, for she received her food, shelter, and regular clothing from her taravād.

The only other obligations of a husband came at the birth of a child. When a woman became pregnant it was necessary for one or more men of appropriate caste to acknowledge possible biological

writes thus in speaking of the Nâyars:—"When the man visits the woman he lays down his arms at the door; but, if there are no arms at the door, any acquaintance may visit her. To visit the house when there are arms at the door, or remove them, is death." Now-a-days a man leaves his shoes outside the door. Equality of the sexes in all sexual matters, the man and woman being on terms of equality, having equal freedom, is certainly an uncommon merit in the Marumakkattâyam system. Either party may terminate the union—even after one night of hymeneal bliss; and those who are unsuited to each other sexually, or in the way of temperament, in fact in any way, may put an end to their union and turn towards other partners. It may be thought that this liberty induced perpetual change, so it is as well to state here that it does nothing of the kind. Mere arbitrary divorce is very rare. Permanent attachment is the rule. The basis of the system seems to be that the Taravâd estate is held in trust for the support of the females and of their descendants in the female line. This trust is placed in the hands of the Kâranavan, the senior male member of the Taravâd who is the legal guardian of every member of it, and whose control of the Taravâd property is absolute. The odd feature in the Marumakkattâyam system is that a man has his nephews about him in the house, and not his sons. He lives in one house, while his wife and family live in another. That is, in South Malabar; in North Malabar they live together.

When we come to consider the degrees of relationship within which marriage is prohibited, we find the rule is that persons descended from a common female ancestor are not at liberty to marry. Those of the same Taravâd can never intermarry; but this prohibition does not of course extend to the children of a brother and a sister, who are naturally of different Taravâds. Again, the principle that "no member of the Taravâd of a deceased wife or husband (is) eligible as the second wife or husband is true only as far as the woman is concerned; for a man may marry a woman of his deceased wife's Taravâd. But he who does this is not in harmony with social sentiment." We find this observance amongst the forest Mûppans of Wynâd. In the case of a man's wife dying, I found that a Mûppan could not take another wife from her family.

The rule does not interfere with union between the children (or their descendants) of a brother and sister

683
the Nâyar would be cut down instantly with a sword: 564
there would be no words. Now that the people of India 783
are inconvenienced with an Arms Act which inhibits [656]
sword play of this kind, and with a law-system under [178]
which high and low are rated alike, the Nâyar has to [201]
content himself with an imperious grunt-like shout for
the way to be cleared for him as he stalks on unperturbed.
His arrogance is not diminished, but he cannot now show
it in quite the same way.

Doubtless the natural habit of seclusion common to 771
Malabar, rendered easy by the wealth of vegetation of
which those who have never visited shores somewhat
alike climatically can have no conception, has favoured
the persistence of earlier forms of belief; but, whatever
may be the reason for it, there is much more of the
extremes of religious belief to be seen amongst the
Nâyars than amongst any other people or caste of
Southern India.

It has been noticed already how that the Malayalis [795]
have, practically, no sects such as obtain throughout the
rest of Southern India. Vishnu, Siva, Bhagavati, Rama—
all these names of the Hindu theogony are meaningless
to them. They do not know one from the other except in
name. Their Hinduism is not that of the rest of South-
ern India.

It is time to come to concrete example, so I will 796
attempt a description of the ceremonial observed at the [773]
Pishâri kâvu—the Pishâri temple near Quilandy on the
coast 15 miles north of Calicut, where Bhagavati is sup-
posed in vague legend to have slain an Asura or
gigantic ogre, in commemoration of which event the
festival is held yearly to Bhagavati and her followers.
It is fairly representative. The deity of the temple [776]
Bhagavati is spoken of as feminine in the spirit of accu-
racy, but it is extremely unlikely whether ten per cent.
of the crowd even thought of sex in connection with
Bhagavati. Sacrifice of goats as part of the ceremonial [782]
was at first denied: it is a mystery too awful to be the
subject of conversation. At the same time, I am inclined
to think that much the weighter reason is that the priests
who cling to this part of the ceremonial are ashamed to
let it be known to the people that they do it. They like
it to be thought that such sacrifice is appropriate to the
inferior races, but that *they* are above it and have nothing
to do with it!

The festival lasts for seven days. When I visited it
in 1895 the last day was on the 31st of March. Before

796 Before
[793] day-break of the first day the ordinary temple priests, a Mûssad, will leave the temple after having swept up and made it clean; and (before day-break also) five Nambûtiris will enter it, bearing with them "Sudhi
796 Kalasam." The Kalasam is on this occasion made of the
778 five products of the cow, *i.e.* (panchagavyam) together
[237] with some water, a few leaves of the banyan tree (Arayâl) and Darbha grass, all in one vessel. Before being brought to the temple, mantrams or magic verses will
[783] have been said over it. The contents of the vessel are sprinkled all about the temple, and a little is put in the well, thus purifying the temple and the well. The Nambûtiris will then perform the usual morning worship, and either immediately after it or very soon afterwards they leave the temple, and the Mûssad, the ordinary priest, returns and resumes his office. The temple belongs
[613] to four Taravâds, and no sooner has it been purified than the Kâranavans of these four Taravâds, virtually the joint-owners of the temple (known as Urâlas) present to the temple servant (known as a Pishârodi) the silver flag of the temple which has been in the custody of one of them since the last festival. The Pishârodi receives it and hoists it in front of the temple (to the east), thus signifying that the festival has begun. While this is being done, emphasis and grandeur is given to the occa-
[201] sion by the firing off of miniature mortars such as are common at all South Indian festivals; and, after the
[411] flag is hoisted, there are hoisted all round the temple small flags of coloured cloth. For the next few days
[788] there is nothing particular to be done beyond the procession morning, noon and night; the image of Bhagavati being carried on an elephant to an orchestra of drums, and cannonade of the little mortars. All those who are present are supposed to be fed from the temple.
796 There is a large crowd. On the morning of the fifth day
564 a man of the washerman (he is also a tailor: Vannân) caste will announce to the neighbours by beat of tom-tom that there will be made a procession of Bhagavati issuing from the gates of the temple and passing round about.
[202] Like all those who are in any way connected with the
[188] temple, this man's office is hereditary and he lives to a small extent on the bounty of the temple, *i.e.*, he holds a
[425] little land on nominal terms from the temple property, in consideration for which he must fulfil certain requirements for the temple as on occasions of festivals. His office also invests him with certain rights in the community. The Vannân has, I believe, immense power

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595 [585] realised, the women among the Nâyars not being restricted to family or number, but, after she has been consecrated by the usual rites before the nuptial fire, in which ceremony any indifferent person may officiate as the representative of her husband, being in her intercourse with the other sex only restrained by her inclinations; provided that the male with whom she associates be of an equal or superior tribe. But it must be stated, for the glory of the female character, that, notwithstanding the latitude thus given to the Nâyattis, and that they are thus left to the guidance of their own free will and the play of their own fancy (which in other countries has not always been found the most efficient check on the conduct of either sex), it rarely happens that they cohabit with more than one person at the same 586 time. Whenever the existing connexion is broken, whether from incompatibility of temper, disgust, caprice, or any of the thousand vexations by which from the frailty of nature domestic happiness is liable to be disturbed, the woman seeks another lover, the man 587 another mistress. But it mostly happens that the bond of paternity is here, as elsewhere, too strong to be shaken off, and that the uninfluenced and uninterested union of love, when formed in youth, continues even in the decline of age."

595 [201] In a note on the Nâyars in the sixteenth century, Cæsar Fredericke writes as follows.* "These Nairi having their wives common amongst themselves, and when any of them goe into the house of any of these women, he leaveth his sworde and target at the door, and the time that he is there, there dare not be any so

* The Voyage and Travell of M. Cæsar Fredericke, Merchant of Venice, into the East Indies and beyond the Indies (1563). Translation. Hakluyt Voyages, V. 394.

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hardie as to come into that house. The king's children shall not inherite the kingdom after their father, because they hold this opinion, that perchance they were not begotten of the king their father, but of some other man, therefore they accept for their king one of the sonnes of the king's sisters, or of some other woman of the blood roiall, for that they be sure that they are of the blood roiall."

In his "New Account of the East Indies, (1727)" Hamilton wrote: "The husbands," of whom, he said, there might be twelve, but no more at one time, "agree very well, for they cohabit with her in their turns, according to their priority of marriage, ten days more or less according as they can fix a term among themselves, and he that cohabits with her maintains her in all things necessary for his time, so that she is plentifully provided for by a constant circulation. When the man that cohabits with her goes into her house he leaves his arms at the door, and none dare remove them or enter the house on pain of death. When she proves with child, she nominates its father, who takes care of his education after she has suckled it, and brought it to walk or speak, but the children are never heirs to their father's estate, but the father's sister's children are."

Writing in the latter half of the eighteenth century, Grose says * that "it is among the Nairs that principally prevails the strange custom of one wife being common to a number; in which point the great power of custom is seen from its rarely or never producing any jealousies or quarrels among the co-tenants of the same woman. Their number is not so much limited by any specific

* Travels to the East Indies.

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595 law as by a kind of tacit convention, it scarcely ever happening that it exceeds six or seven. The woman, however, is under no obligation to admit above a single attachment, though not less respected for using her
● [201] privilege to its utmost extent. If one of the husbands happens to come to the house when she is employed with another, he knows that circumstance by certain signals left at the door that his turn is not come, and
564 departs very resignedly." Writing about the same time,
595 Sonnerat * says that "these Brahmans do not marry, but have the privilege of enjoying all the Nairesses.
[648] This privilege the Portuguese who were esteemed as a great caste, obtained and preserved, till their drunkenness and debauchery betrayed them into a commerce with all sorts of women. The following right is established by the customs of the country. A woman without
[851] shame may abandon herself to all men who are not of an
[604] inferior caste to her own, because the children (notwithstanding what Mr. de Voltaire says) do not belong to the father, but to the mother's brother; they become his legitimate heirs at their birth, even of the crown if he is king." In his 'Voyages and Travels', Kerr writes as follows. † "By the laws of their country these Nayres cannot marry, so that no one has any certain or acknowledged son or father; all their children being born of mistresses, with each of whom three or four Nayres cohabit by agreement among themselves. Each one of this cofraternity dwells a day in his turn with the joint mistress, counting from noon of one day to the same time of the next, after which he departs, and another

* Voyage to the East Indies, 1774 and 1781.

† R. Kerr. General History and Collection of Voyages and Travels, 1811, History of the Discovery and Conquest of India by the Portuguese between the years 1497 and 1525, from the original Portuguese of Herman Lopes de Castaneda.

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event the festival is held yearly to Bhagavati and her followers. The festival lasts for seven days. When I visited it in 1895, the last day was on the 31st of March. Before daybreak of the first day, the ordinary temple priest, a Mūssad, will leave the temple after having swept it and made it clean; and (also before daybreak) five Nambūtiris will enter it, bearing with them sudhi kalasam. The kalasam is on this occasion made of the five products of the cow (panchagavyam), together with some water, a few leaves of the banyan tree, and darbha grass, all in one vessel. Before being brought to the temple, mantrams or magic verses will have been said over it. The contents of the vessel are sprinkled all about the temple, and a little is put in the well, thus purifying the temple and the well. The Nambūtiris will then perform the usual morning worship, and, either immediately after it or very soon afterwards, they leave the temple, and the Mūssad returns and resumes his office. The temple belongs to four taravāds, and no sooner has it been purified than the Kāranavans of these four taravāds, virtually the joint-owners of the temple (known as Urālas) present to the temple servant (Pishārodi) the silver flag of the temple, which has been in the custody of one of them since the last festival. The Pishārodi receives it, and hoists it in front of the temple (to the east), thus signifying that the festival has begun. While this is being done, emphasis and grandeur is given to the occasion by the firing off of miniature mortars such as are common at all South Indian festivals. After the flag is hoisted, there are hoisted all round the temple small flags of coloured cloth. For the next few days there is nothing particular to be done beyond the procession morning, noon, and night; the image of Bhagavati being carried on an elephant to an orchestra